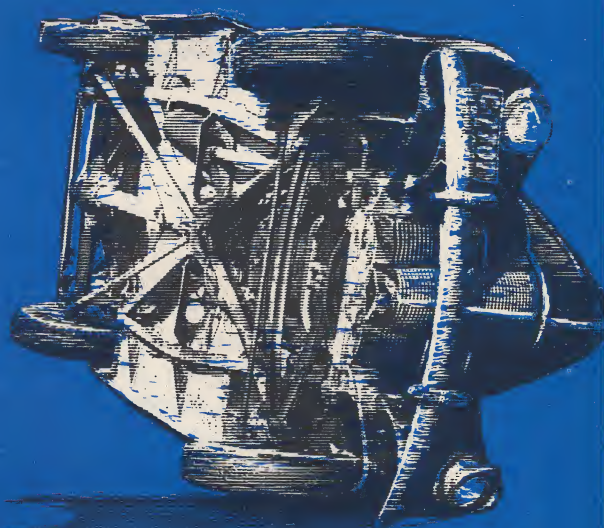


CAR OR COFFIN ?



Which Do You Drive?

by David C. King



THE DEADLY RAIN

HOWARD ARNOT COULD FEEL his mind being lulled by the monotonous click of windshield wipers and the steady hum of tires on rain-slick pavement. He was becoming drowsy. He let the speedometer edge over fifty. The sooner he got home the better.

If it had been winter, with snow sparkling in the beam of his headlights, and ice glistening on the road, he would have been creeping along. He knew that you can't be too careful in the treacherous conditions of winter driving. But it was summer now, and a little rain never made any difference.

The car ahead of him seemed to be crawling. He swung out to pass. He was all the way into the left lane before he saw the headlights of a truck flash over the crest of a hill.

A sudden, cold panic brought his senses to life. He could make

it. There was still time. There was still room.

He jammed on his brakes and tried to turn back into the right lane. But he didn't count on the rain. For a split second his tires didn't grip. The car skidded sideways—not more than a couple of feet. But the rear of the car slid back over the center line into the path of the truck.

The big tractor-trailer smashed into Arnot's car, a glancing blow just behind the driver's door. The car spun crazily and went off the road. It smashed through a guard rail and plunged down a steep embankment, crashing into a tree. Arnot's limp form was hurled to the ground.

The truck, out of control, roared down the highway for nearly a quarter of a mile. It veered off the left side of the road and rammed head-on into a tree. The driver was killed instantly, his chest crushed by the steering wheel, his head gashed by countless fragments of glass.

The driver of the car Arnot had been trying to pass pulled off the road and ran back to the scene. He stumbled and slid down the ravine to the twisted wreckage of Arnot's car.

Arnot was lying a few feet away, face up, his arms spread wide, his eyes open in a glassy stare. His face was covered with blood and an ugly, dark stain was spreading on his chest.

He moaned. The driver knelt down next to him. "Am I hurt?" Arnot groaned. "Is it bad?"

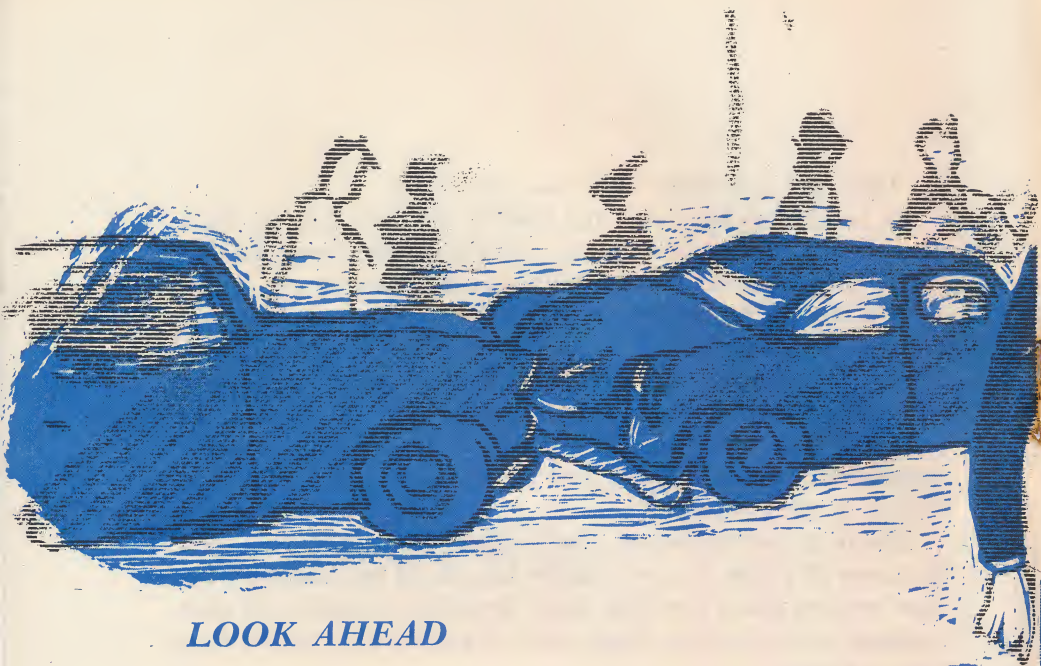
He never found out. He blacked out and died in a hospital two days later without regaining consciousness.

Arnot wouldn't have been killed that night if it hadn't been raining. A small patch of surface water made the difference.

Few drivers expect wet pavement to be slippery. Ice and snow are different. The driver slows down. He senses, every time he touches his brakes, he may go into a skid. He is alert and ready.

But we don't expect wet pavement to be slippery and that makes it far more deadly than ice or snow.

In 1956, New York City police conducted one of the few surveys on the hazards of wet pavement. They found that traffic deaths increased 100 percent in the rain. And, according to the figures of the National Safety Council, *nearly 15 percent of all fatal accidents occur on wet pavement, but only about 4 percent on ice or snow.*



LOOK AHEAD

THE LATE AFTERNOON RUSH HOUR on a hot summer day, a Friday, a time when impatient commuters are hurrying to escape the smoldering heat of the city. Cars are packed close together, bumper to bumper.

A stop light flicks to green and a string of cars leaps through the intersection. A small boy darts in front of the lead car. The driver sees him and slams on his brakes.

Tires screech. Horns blast. Cars pile into each other in a series of collisions like a string of Chinese firecrackers. Seven cars are involved.

The first car was hit from behind. It lurched forward and pinned the boy against the side of a parked car, twisting and crushing his body between two walls of metal and glass.

The car came to a stop only inches from the parked vehicle, the boy still suspended between them. His feet weren't touching the ground. His body was twisted at a grotesque angle; his face was a mass of bruises. His rib cage had been crushed, his skull fractured in a dozen places. One of the cars had to be backed off before the lifeless body could be freed.

Why did it happen? Who was to blame?

When the police came, the driver of the killer car was close to



hysterics. But he didn't feel it was his fault. "What could I do?" he wailed, wringing his hands. "I was hit from behind. I couldn't stop. What could I do?"

Grim-faced, the officers went through the routine of questioning the other drivers. No, none of them had seen the boy. Each driver had tried to stop when he saw the car in front stop. It had all happened so suddenly there wasn't anything anyone could do. It was an "accident." You really couldn't blame anyone.

But none of them was innocent: *They all shared in the boy's death. They were guilty of the same fatal error: They hadn't looked ahead.*

Like most drivers, they had been operating within a myopic field of awareness. They knew what was going on around and directly in front of them. But with their vision riveted to the road a few feet ahead, they hadn't seen trouble coming until it was too late.

The only way you can ride the bumper of another car is to know what is going on in front of that car. You have to be able to stop at almost the same moment the other car does.

Even with a clear road, you can be prepared for emergency only by looking ahead. *In city driving, by looking at least a half a block ahead, you can see danger developing.* By doing so you keep control of your car and you have time on your side.

This is just as important on the open highway. The greater the speed, the further ahead you must look. *At 50 mph your field of vision should extend a quarter to a half a mile in front of you.*

PASS—ONE AT A TIME

THE TWO TRUCKS LABORED SLOWLY up the steep incline, the diesel engines roaring in low gear. Richard Scott, driving behind them, waited impatiently for a chance to pass.

They reached the crest of the hill. The trucks seemed to hesitate a moment. Gears shifted. Then they began rolling down the other side, rapidly picking up speed.

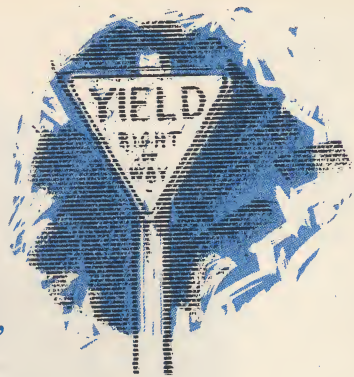
The road ahead looked clear and Scott pulled out to pass both vehicles. He passed the first truck. He was just pulling abreast of the other when that truck suddenly swung out to pass another vehicle—a car that Scott hadn't been able to see.

The truck driver saw Scott's car—but too late. The cab of the truck sideswiped the car. The truck driver kept control but Scott's car bounced away from the collision and off the road. It leaped a drainage ditch and smashed head-on into a stone wall. The front of the car folded up like an accordion.

Scott was pinned between the twisted steering wheel and the back of the seat, his face only inches from the shattered windshield. Two state policemen spent nearly an hour trying to pry him loose with crowbars. Scott watched them helplessly while his life slowly ebbed away. He died only minutes after they freed him. His neck had been broken.

You cannot always look ahead to anticipate danger. The driver who tries to pass two vehicles at once exposes himself at a time when his vision is blocked. *He has no way of knowing what is happening ahead of him.* Most of the time he can get away with it—but sometimes he can't.





“EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED”

TED THORPE WAS SURE the other car would stop, so he didn't slow down. His father, sitting next to him, said nothing. The boy had had his license only a few weeks, but Mr. Thorpe had schooled him carefully in what he felt were the fine points of safe driving. He could take care of himself. Besides, Ted clearly had the right of way. There was no need to warn him.

But the other car didn't stop. It raced through the yield sign and onto the highway at full speed. It rammed into the right front side of the Thorpe car. Ted didn't have a chance. He clutched the wheel helplessly as the car hurtled off the road and down a steep hill. It rolled over four times.

When passersby got to the car, Ted was still in the driver's seat, still gripping the steering wheel. He was stunned and shocked, his eyes staring blankly. He wasn't badly hurt. He didn't know what had happened.

“Where's Dad?” he mumbled over and over. “Is Dad all right?”

No one had the nerve to tell him. Mr. Thorpe had been thrown from the car when it was hit, and had tumbled under the rear wheel. Both the front and back wheels of the other car had passed over him. One of the witnesses had hurriedly covered the body with a blanket. There was no need to look more closely to make sure he was dead.

Ironically, the driver of the other car had been protected by a seat belt. Like Ted Thorpe, he escaped with minor injuries.

The Thorpe boy had followed the book to the letter. He had done everything he was trained to do. No one had told him that *you should never trust another driver.*

You can anticipate most accident situations, but you cannot anticipate the actions of another driver. Predicting human behavior is a risky game at best, and not the sort to stake your life on. In the words of the late Mayor LaGuardia, the only answer is to *“expect the unexpected.”*

ROULETTE ON WHEELS

OTTO KRIPS COULDN'T SEE A BREAK in the traffic anywhere. He began to wonder if he was ever going to find a chance to go through the intersection.

Then, suddenly, there was a lull. All clear on the left. A bus coming from the right. He could just make it.

He stepped on the accelerator and the car roared out of the side road. But he'd misjudged the speed of the bus.

The bus driver hit his horn and his brake at the same instant, and tried to swerve into the other lane. A man sitting behind him yelled, "Watch out!" A woman screamed. It was too late.

The front of the bus just clipped the rear of the car and skidded past it. The Krips car was spun around facing the direction the bus had come. It was hit head-on by a car that had been traveling behind the bus.

The bus driver grabbed his first-aid kit and leaped out the door. His stunned passengers gaped out the windows at him.

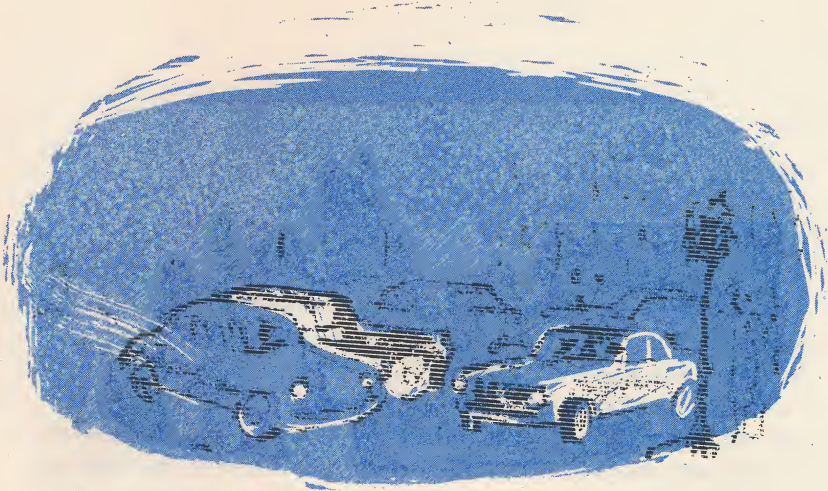
There was no need for the first-aid kit. Krips was dead. He had been hurled against the windshield and his head was protruding through a gaping hole in the glass.

The other driver was lying on the pavement, his feet still in the car. There was already a pool of blood beneath his head and his face no longer resembled anything human.

The stories of such tragedies are told in fractions of seconds and in the mathematics of chance. To save a few seconds, a driver takes an added risk. He makes time his enemy and he stacks the odds against himself.

We've all been guilty of this. How many times, for example, in your eagerness to make a left turn, have you forced an oncoming car to slow down? Every time you do this, every time you force another driver to change his driving pattern, you invite disaster. You have placed your life in his hands.

The only alternative is to refuse to gamble. *Whenever two choices are open, take the conservative one, the safe one.* You will lose a few minutes. You may get a few impatient honks from behind. You may be late getting home . . . but you'll get there.



STOP—THEN LOOK

ON A VACATION TOUR of Civil War battlefields, James Carpenter lost his way while trying to find the site of a famous battle. Everyone in the car—he, his wife, their two sons—looked in vain for a route sign. They were on the edge of a small town. Traffic was heavy. But Carpenter didn't want to take the time to pull off the road. He'd get his bearings in a moment.

His speed became erratic. He slowed down whenever he spotted a sign. Drivers behind him honked impatiently. Some managed to pass him and they glared back at him angrily.

As he started through an intersection, he thought he saw the sign. He slowed down abruptly.

The driver behind him swung sharply to the right to pass. At the same moment, a driver coming the other way, thinking Carpenter was stopping for him, made a left turn. He hit the other car and the Carpenter car rammed into him.

It was a small accident. Headlights were broken. Bumpers were crumpled. The total damage probably wasn't over \$200. But it was a fatal accident. Carpenter's youngest son was hurled against the dashboard. His skull was fractured and he died three days later.

There is never any excuse for creating confusion in traffic. When a driver forgets about his driving to look for something—directions, an address, a parking space—he creates an unpredictable hazard for everyone else. And he commits the serious blunder of making *someone else responsible for his life.*

THE AVENGING ANGEL

THERE WAS NO WARNING. The car, an old model driven by a teenage boy, raced past her and then cut sharply in front of her.

The woman jammed on her brakes—probably harder than was necessary. The car screeched to a stop. The car behind her swerved and narrowly avoided a collision.

Trembling with rage, she sped after the boy. She caught up with the car, stayed abreast for a moment, and then viciously cut him off.

The boy panicked. He tried to stop and swerve to the right at the same time. His action was too abrupt. The car went out of control and leaped the curb.

An elderly man, standing on the sidewalk, just had time to raise his hands in a helpless gesture before the car knocked him to the pavement. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

At the hearing a few weeks later, the woman was questioned about her actions. She was sorry about the old man, but, she said archly, "that boy cut me off first and he had it coming to him."

Under the circumstances, her statement is shocking. But the basic attitude is commonplace. It is one of the most common faults of normally cautious drivers. A wrong committed by another driver becomes an unpardonable sin. We are enraged when someone cuts in front of us. Somehow we feel our honor is at stake, and there is nothing to do but catch the culprit and do him one better. This is a standard philosophy for a TV Western, but *revenge doesn't have any place on the highway.*

SHOULDERS ARE FOR PARKING

FLOYD BENNETT, A TRUCK DRIVER, was driving home from work in his car, traveling on a road that followed a river. Patches of fog rolled in off the water and he drove with extra caution.

Suddenly, ahead of him, he heard the muffled sound of a crash. Seconds later, his headlights revealed a late model convertible upended in a ditch, its rear wheels still spinning.

Bennett stopped at the side of the road and got out. He didn't notice that his left rear wheel was still on the pavement. He was just passing in front of his car when a third driver, traveling in the

same direction, crashed into the rear of Bennett's vehicle. The car jumped forward. Bennett was struck and run over by his own car. His became the second death in the double accident.

Most drivers are careful when they park at the side of the road. But even the most cautious tend to forget themselves when they come upon the scene of an accident.

There is something about an accident that compels our attention. We are curious. We sense the dramatic, the unusual, the tragic. We want a closer look. Or maybe we just want to see if we can help. In any case, there is a strong urge to leave our cars and run to the scene. *Hundreds of fatal accidents have been turned into double tragedies because a driver forgot to pull off the highway first and then go to the accident.*

PARKING LIGHTS AREN'T HEADLIGHTS

WHEN MRS. WILLIAM SHAEFFER STARTED HOME with her mother and a neighbor, she flicked on her parking lights. The valleys were deep in shadow, but on straight stretches she could still see behind her the great orange globe of sun resting on the horizon. No need to turn on the headlights yet.

Harold Bookman, coming from the other direction, was looking into the sun. Against the dark background of a building, he didn't see Mrs. Shaeffer's car; he didn't notice the two small parking lights. Thinking he had a clear road, he crossed the center line to pass another car.

The Bookman and Shaeffer cars collided head-on, both traveling at about 50 mph. The two cars just folded into each other, the front ends literally welded together. The compressed wreckage took up about as much space as one car normally would. And from the twisted heap of metal and glass, firemen, police and a wrecking crew worked for over two hours to extract the scarcely identifiable bodies of Bookman, Mrs. Shaeffer, and her two passengers.

Witnesses said the accident happened "without warning." But there should have been a warning. Mrs. Shaeffer ignored one of the most neglected rules of the road: *If it's dark enough for parking lights, it's dark enough for headlights.* That was all the warning Bookman would have needed.

FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS, PLEASE!

THE FOUR TEENAGERS WERE on their way home from the last dance of the school year. They had double-dated in Steve Morrow's new car, a graduation present from his parents.

As he drove over the crest of a hill, Steve was suddenly confronted by two cars abreast coming towards him at a high speed.

He swerved the wheel frantically to avoid a head-on crash. But there was no room. The car bounced off a culvert marker, went out of control, and plunged down the steep hillside. It flipped end over end three times before coming to rest upside down.

The car was a total loss. The roof was flattened, the windshield smashed, and two doors had been torn off. The youngsters should have been killed. But they weren't. The worst injury was a broken nose suffered by the driver. The others had only cuts and bruises.

It was a miracle that they lived, but a miracle with a reason: *All four were wearing seat belts.*

In the past year or two, the sluggish campaign for this essential safety device has gradually gathered momentum. Obviously, belts are no cure-all. They don't guarantee safety, and detractors are fond of pointing out cases where people have lost their lives *because* they were strapped into their seats.

But seat belts are one of the few mechanical devices that can radically reduce highway deaths.

Each year nearly 40,000 people are killed on our highways, twice that many are maimed, and well over one million are injured. The National Safety Council estimates that seat belts could reduce injuries by one-third, deaths by 5,000. This figure was not picked out of the air. It is based on careful study. *Seat belts do work.*

Project these figures back for a couple of decades and the results are startling. If seat belts had been used consistently since around 1940, it is likely that there would have been at least *100,000 fewer traffic deaths* in the succeeding years—enough people to populate a city the size of Madison, Wisconsin. In the same period, injuries would have been reduced by as much as six million, and about 500,000 people would not have been permanently disabled by the loss of an eye or a limb.

The snowballing publicity has led to a great increase in the

number of seat belts. Unfortunately, it appears that an additional campaign will be needed to persuade people to use them. This writer interviewed more than 200 people involved in accidents in cars equipped with seat belts. Of this number only 64, or roughly 30 percent, had their belts properly attached at the time of the collision.

Those who didn't use the belts almost always gave the same reason: It was too much trouble because they were only going a short distance. But the point is that most of their driving was close to home, and that's where most accidents happen.

The most valuable contribution a seat belt makes is to remind the driver who straps it on that he is using good driving sense.

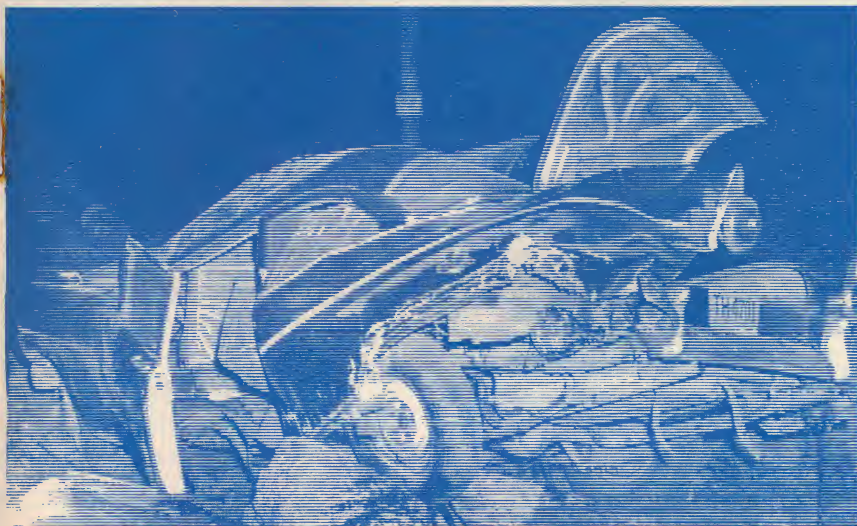


IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, sensible driving is largely a matter of attitudes. The driver who does not think about driving in an intelligent way, who does not avoid the lapses caused by hurry or thoughtlessness, who is not familiar with the fundamentals of safe driving, is well equipped to play and lose at this giant game of Russian roulette.

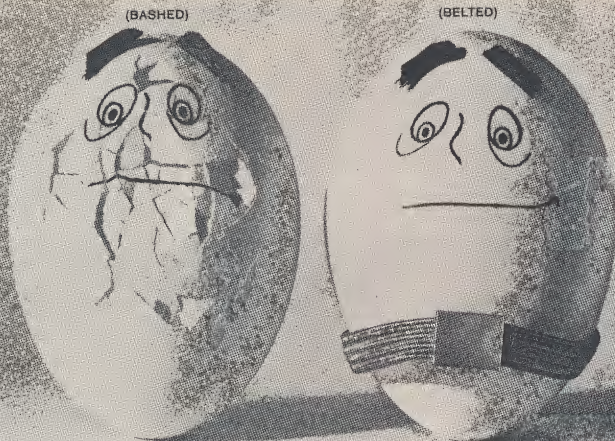
Safety— The Product Of Knowing and Doing The Right Thing

Remember—

1. Rain-slick pavements are far more deadly than roads clogged with ice or snow.
2. Look at least a half block ahead, instead of riveting your eyes to the bumper of the car before you.
3. Pass only one car at a time.



4. When you drive, always expect the unexpected. You risk your life when you assume you can outguess the other driver.
5. Get out of the traffic line when you look for an address, or for directions, or before stopping to orient yourself.
6. When someone cuts you off on the road, remember you are the driver of a machine, not a knight in armor on a horse.
7. Memorize: "If it's dark enough for parking lights, it's dark enough for headlights." Keep your headlights on when you park temporarily.
8. Pull off the highway first—then park.



A PUBLIC SERVICE OF TRANSIT ADVERTISING

Seat belts make the critical difference!

DAVID C. KING *was formerly an accident insurance investigator. He drove more than 200,000 miles completing assignments and held more than 10,000 accident interviews.*

TOM McARTHUR *designed and illustrated this booklet.*

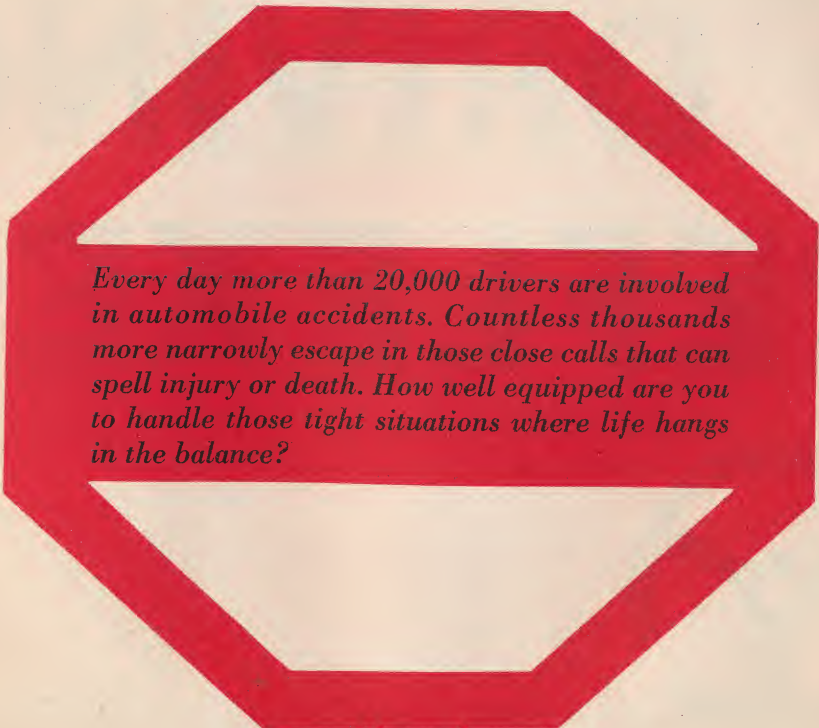
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A DRIVING

REFLEXES

 **QUIZ**

by David C. King



Every day more than 20,000 drivers are involved in automobile accidents. Countless thousands more narrowly escape in those close calls that can spell injury or death. How well equipped are you to handle those tight situations where life hangs in the balance?

Q Swerving to avoid a collision, your car skids out of control, crashes through a guard rail and plunges into twenty feet of water. Can you escape?



Q Traveling at 40 m.p.h. in moderately heavy highway traffic, a front tire on your car blows out. What do you do?



Q Traveling at night on a country highway, you pull out to pass another car. In the dark, you haven't noticed a dip in the road ahead of you. Just as you come abreast of the slower car, headlights materialize in front of you. There isn't time to pull back. What do you do?



A Yes. If possible close all windows — fast. Then wait. Don't try to open the doors—you won't be able to. When the water is chin high, you're ready. Take a deep breath of what air is left and open the door—with that much water in the car, the door will open easily.

A Don't jam on the brakes and don't make any sudden moves. Hold the car steadily on its course, brake gently and edge off the road.

A Head for the ditch, at as much of an angle as you can manage. The oncoming car may head for the same spot, but at least the collision will not be directly head on. If you have time, turn off the ignition.

Q Driving through hilly country, you are on a narrow, curving road. There is a sheer drop on your left and a steep hill on your right, with practically no shoulder. Suddenly, on a curve, two cars abreast come at you at high speed. You know you can't stop in time and there is no room to turn. What do you do?



A Collision seems inevitable. Swerve to your right, toward the steep hillside. You probably will still be hit but it is always best to avoid a direct head on collision. If you have time, turn off the ignition. If you have no seat belt, throw yourself to the right, away from the steering wheel.

Q The whole family is in the car and you're out for a Sunday drive. Traffic is heavy, and, as usual, other cars are driving perilously close to your rear bumper. Suddenly a dog darts in front of your car. What do you do?



A Stop if you can, but don't jam on your brakes. If you stop too suddenly you may hurl your passengers against the dashboard or windshield — unless they are wearing seat belts, which, of course, they should be. But you also have to remember the inconsiderate driver behind you. If you stop too suddenly, he is likely to smash into the rear of your car. Cruel as it sounds, it is better to sacrifice the life of a dog than to endanger the lives of your family.

Q In a rainstorm, your car skids on the wet pavement, veers off the road, and smashes into a telephone pole. You're not badly injured, but the crash has severed the wires and the downed portions are lying across the hood of your car. How do you get out?



A You don't get out. Stay right where you are. Don't even touch the door handle. As long as you stay where you are, you're safe. If you tried to get out you would probably be electrocuted.

Q Driving on a lonely stretch of highway at night, your lights suddenly fail—the fuse has blown. What do you do?



A Pull off the road immediately.⁹ Don't try to drive without lights and don't try to follow another car. If you have a cigarette pack or a pack of chewing gum, tear off a piece of the silver wrapper—about a two-inch square — and carefully peel the paper away from the tinfoil. Next, remove the fuse (under the dashboard) and wrap the tinfoil tightly around it. Replace the fuse—this will give you a connection that will last long enough to keep the lights burning until you can get to a service station.

Q Driving down a steep hill, your brakes fail. What do you do?



A Shift into low gear. Try your emergency brake — a little at a time. If this doesn't work, get off the road as quickly as possible. If there is a long stretch of down grade ahead of you that will increase your speed, head for anything that will stop you with the least impact, such as the side of the hill or a clump of bushes.

Q You're driving in a fog on a dark country road that has no markings. The fog thickens and even with your high beam lights you can't tell whether you're on the right side of the road or not. You realize you're on the wrong side of the road when a pair of headlights suddenly pierces the mist directly in front of you. What do you do?



A Since there's nothing on your right—where you're supposed to be — you should be able to swerve to avoid a collision. After that, get back on the proper side of the road and drive with one wheel on the shoulder. Next, switch back to low beams — high beams simply reflect off the fog almost at eye level. If these two techniques don't work, pull off the road—completely off—and wait for conditions to improve.

Q At dusk you're driving on a deserted stretch of highway when you come upon the scene of a violent collision. Two cars have hit head on. You're the first on the scene and you stop to help. The two cars are blocking one lane, and the driver of one of the cars is sprawled, unconscious, in the center of the road. Everyone else in the two cars is injured. What do you do?



A First, if there is someone with you, have them signal oncoming traffic with a flashlight. Railroad flares are much more effective and they're quite inexpensive. If you're alone, place your car in the center of the road with the headlights on. Prop a stick or your tire iron through the steering wheel so that the horn sounds constantly.

Next, do what you can for the victims. Don't move anyone. The only thing you can do for the driver in the road is to cover him with a blanket. Unless you have some knowledge of first aid you shouldn't do anything more than to stop any extensive bleeding.

If you scored 8 or better, anyone should feel safe driving with you; 5-7 is average—and that isn't good enough; if you're under 5 points, turn the keys over to someone else. The bonus for a perfect score?—it may be your life.

Celia R. Fiddler, Editor

David C. King, formerly an accident insurance investigator, has driven more than 200,000 miles completing assignments and has interviewed more than 10,000 accident cases. He has written numerous articles on safety.

Ruth Levi designed and illustrated this booklet.

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